



# 2020 Naviance Student Survey Report





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# Executive Summary

## 2020 Naviance Student Survey

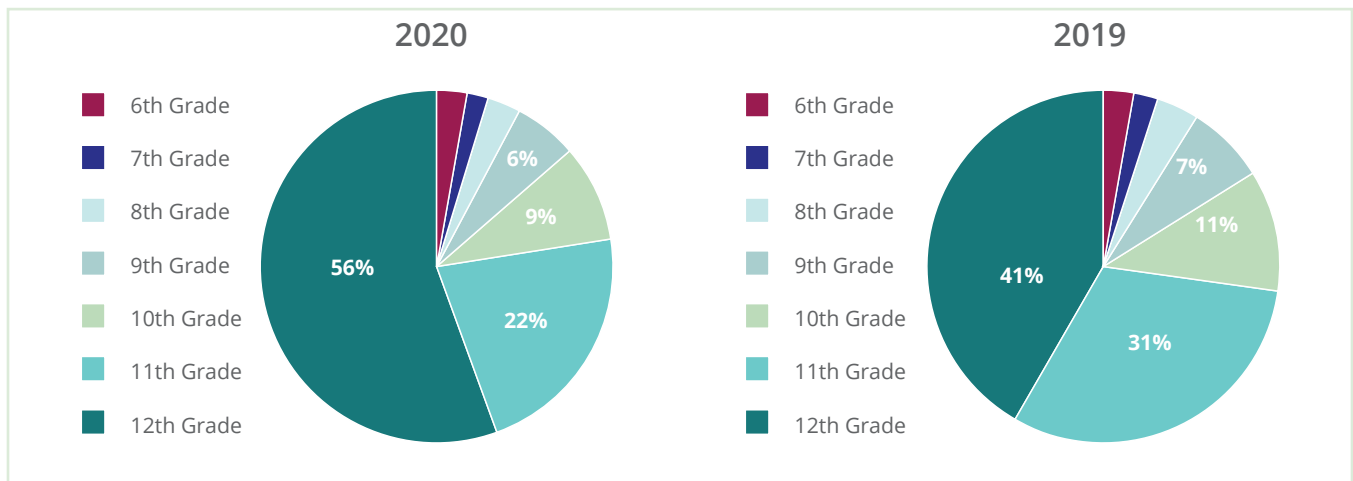
Our second annual Naviance Student Survey Report examines the college planning process of 9th through 12th grade students and identifies opportunities for higher education institutions to support them throughout the recruitment process.

Key results of the survey are highlighted throughout this report, including context within the competitive landscape, insights from Naviance, and key takeaways and recommendations for higher education recruitment.

*Data updated as of November 9, 2020.*

## Scope

Insights in this report were drawn from 9,618 anonymous responses in 2020, and 3,026 anonymous responses in 2019. Our interpretations of the survey results grouped together the answers from 9th and 10th grade students, while responses from 11th and 12th graders were considered separately, within their respective cohorts. We compared the 2019 responses with those from 2020.



## 5 Key Recommendations

- **Engage students** with messages aligned to their selection criteria during the upcoming recruiting process as it will be more important than ever.
- **Communicate transparently** about financial aid, scholarship, and cost of education information and share that information early in the process.
- Recruit future classes with additional **flexibility, support, and personalization**.
- **Focus on differentiating** your visit experience among a sea of virtual options because students will be participating in these opportunities more than ever.
- Continue to **develop tailored and innovative experiences** to connect and engage with students including completely virtual and hybrid options.





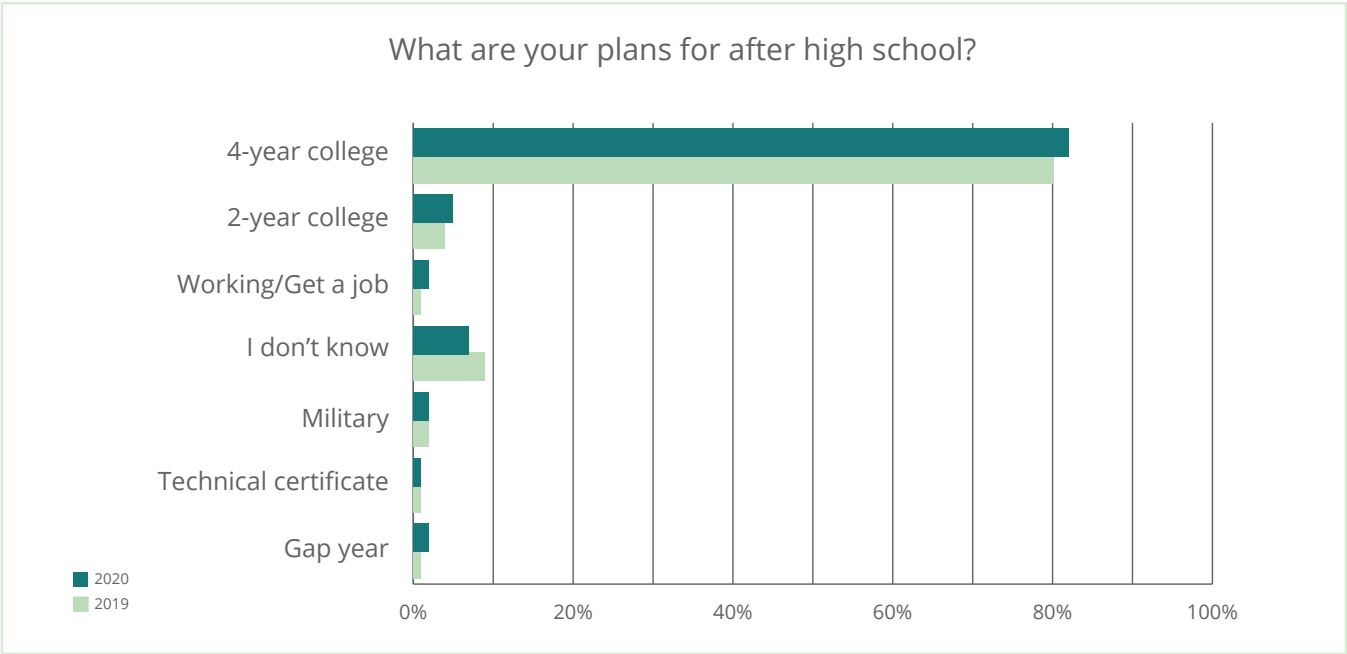
## 9th and 10th Grade Students



# 9th and 10th Grade Students

## Plans to Attend College Remain Steady

Student aspirations are high, especially among underclassmen. We asked students what they planned on doing after high school. In 2020, similar to 2019, 82% of 9th and 10th grade students indicated that they planned to attend a 4-year college.



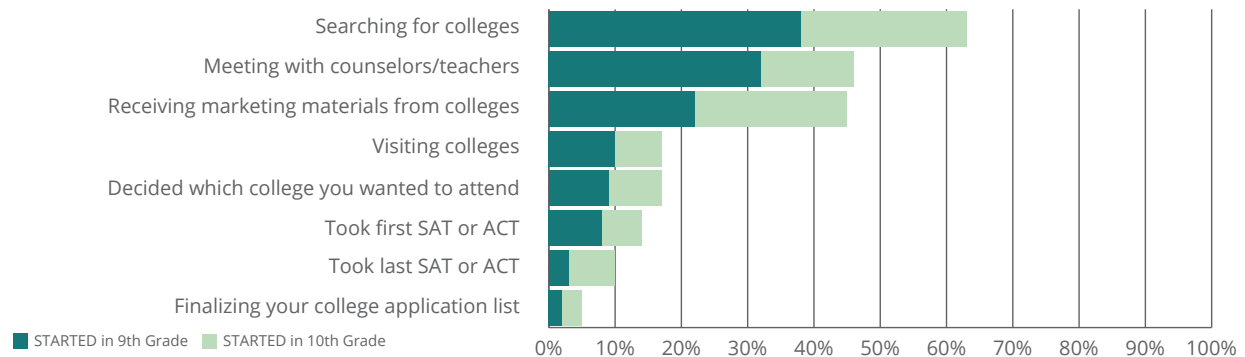
## Significant Drop in College Search Activities

Among 9th and 10th grade students, college search activities decreased by 8-percentage points between 2019 and 2020. More importantly, the survey showed a 15-percentage point decrease in each of these areas: visiting colleges, meeting with counselors or teachers, and receiving marketing materials from colleges. These combined results suggest that this group will be significantly behind in planning for college.

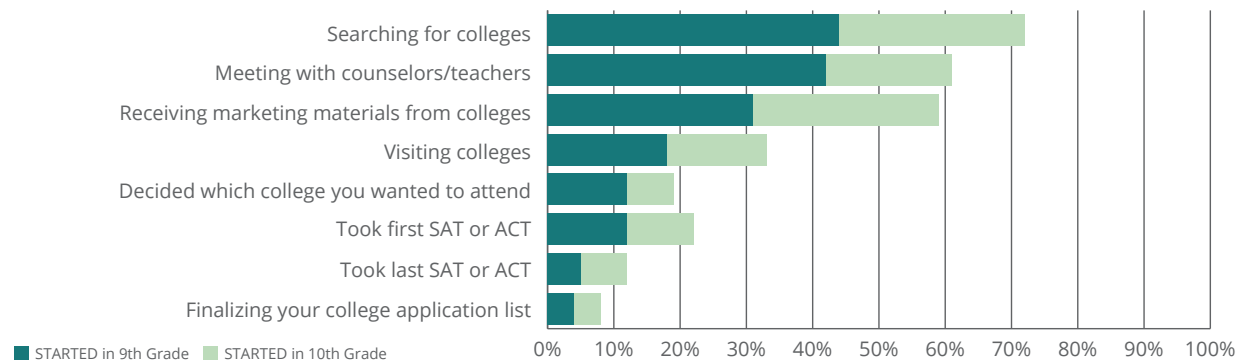


*Decrease by 15-percentage points in each of these areas:*  
*~Visiting colleges*  
*~Meeting with counselors / teachers*  
*~Receiving marketing materials from colleges*

### 2020 – Based on these activities, when did you START looking at colleges?



### 2019 – Based on these activities, when did you START looking at colleges?

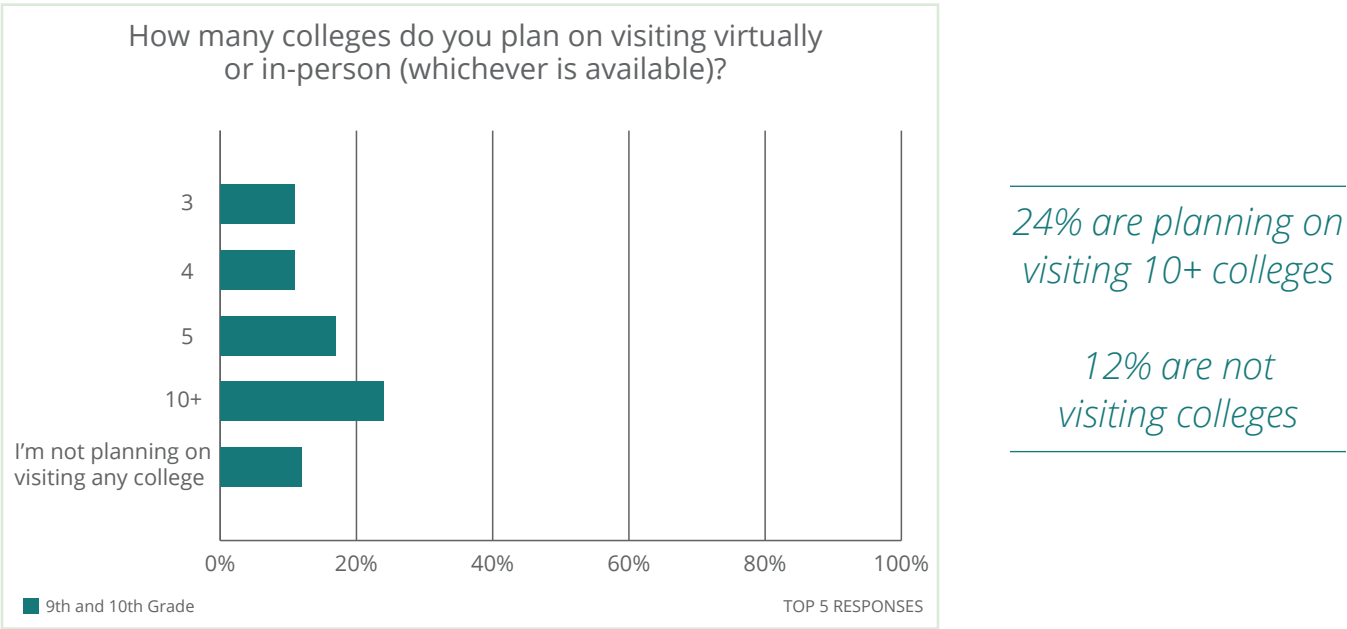


*Stay focused on engaging with students. They are still searching for colleges, even if they are behind in the process.*



# Substantial Drop in Plans to Visit Colleges, Even Virtually

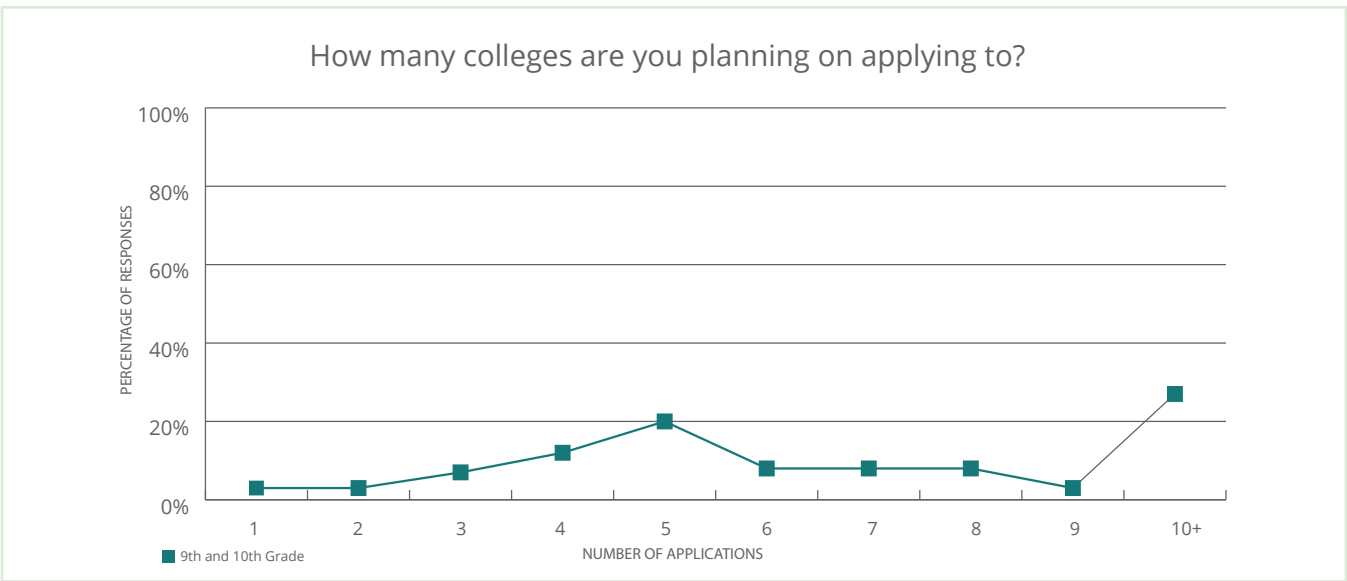
For the first time, we asked students in the May 2020 survey about their plans for visiting colleges. Almost a quarter of 9th and 10th grade students anticipate visiting 10+ colleges, while an alarming 12% aren't planning to visit colleges at all.



*Since fewer 9th and 10th grade students plan to attend college visits, it is crucial to develop innovative approaches to reach them. Partner with counselors to find creative ways for students to experience the benefits of your institution.*

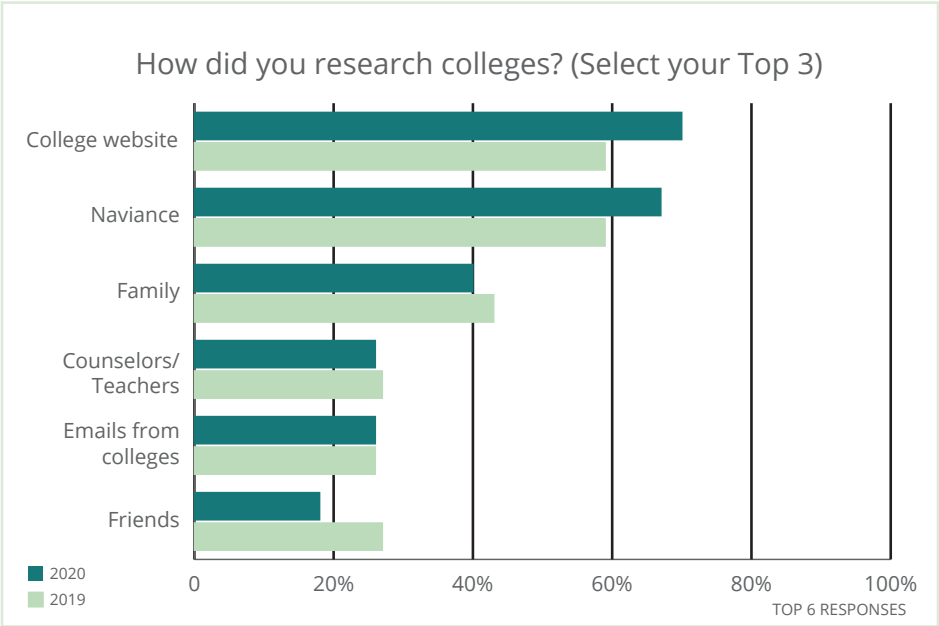
## Consistency in Applications

Students were asked how many college applications they planned to submit. More than a quarter said they would apply to 10 or more schools, while 20% intend to apply to five schools. These findings are consistent with the numbers for 11th and 12th grade students.



# Big Shifts in Researching College

Students in 9th and 10th grades were asked how they research colleges. For 2020, there was an increase in turning to college websites, Naviance tools, and a significant decrease in obtaining information from friends.



10-percentage point increase in college website

8-percentage point increase in Naviance

9-percentage point decrease in friends

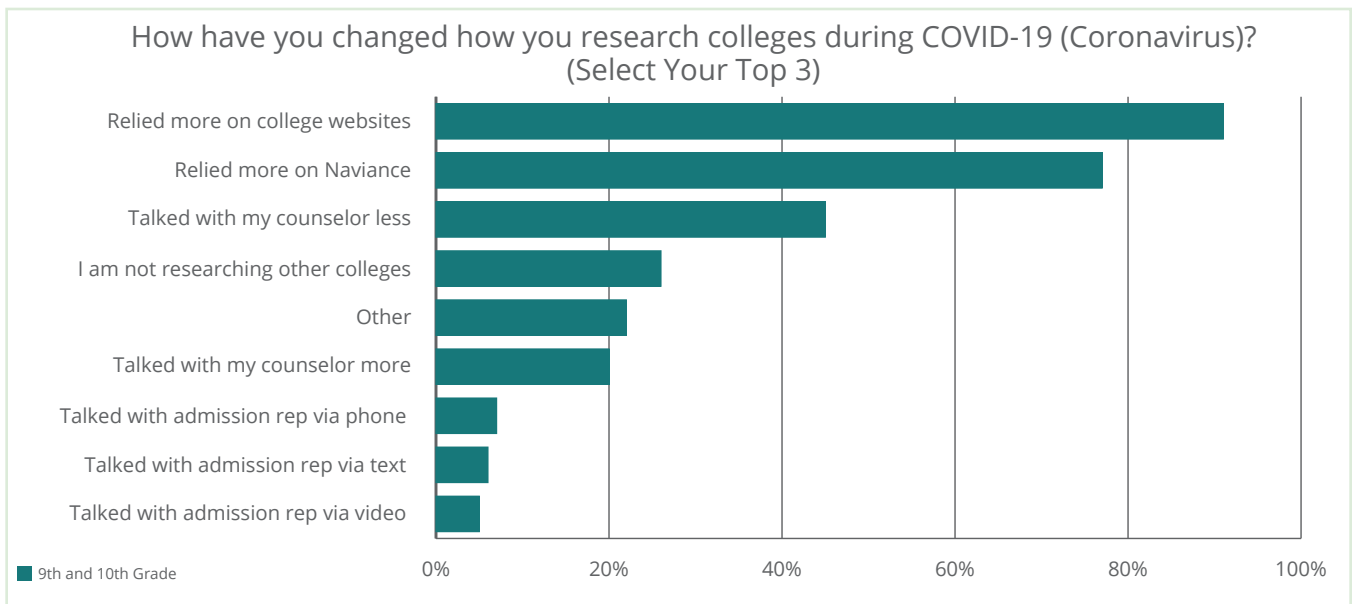




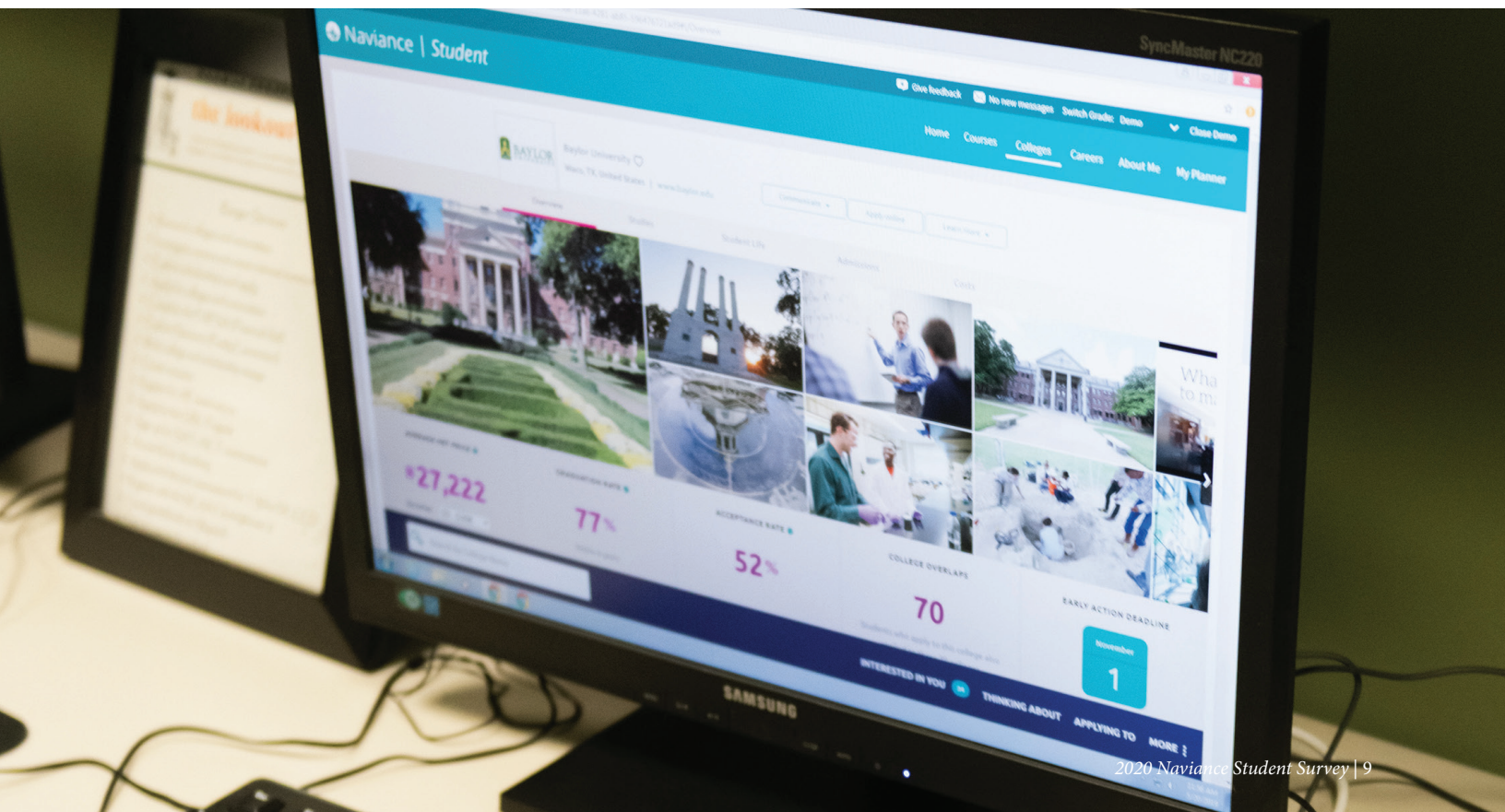
## Relying Less on Counselors and More on College Websites

In 2020, we asked students how COVID-19 changed the way they researched colleges.

Similar to our findings from 11th and 12th grade students, we see 9th and 10th grade students relying less on counselors and more on college websites and admission teams.

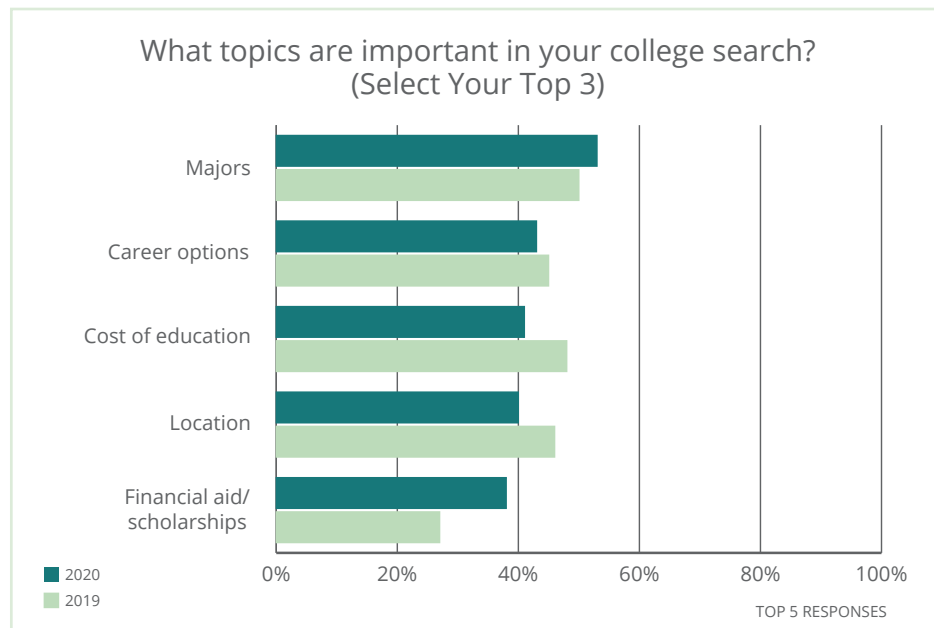


*With 9th and 10th grade students shifting how they research colleges, institutions should refine their tactics to align with the increased reliance on their websites and Naviance.*



## Emphasis on Paying for College

When students were asked what topics were important during their search, 9th and 10th grade students focused on the top five responses in the chart below. Compared to 2019, there was an increase by 11-percentage points in seeking information about financial aid/scholarships.



*11-percentage point  
increase in financial  
aid / scholarships*

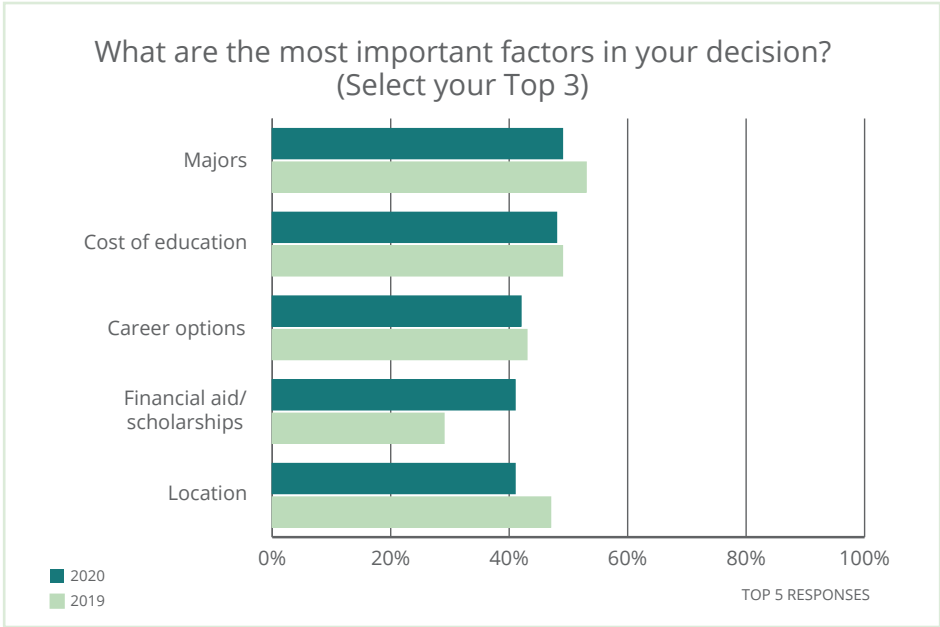
*Be transparent about financial aid and scholarships, and share  
this information early in the process.*





# Continued Emphasis on Financial Considerations

Students were asked the same question to focus on what factors were important for deciding which college to attend. Among 9th and 10th grade students, financial aid/scholarships increased by 12-percentage points, while location decreased by 7-percentage points. This group's renewed focus on college costs is on par with responses from 12th grade students.



12-percentage point increase in financial aid / scholarships

7-percentage point decrease in location

*Data suggests 9th and 10th grade students are not as concerned about where they will go to college as they are about how to pay for it. If location is one of your institution's key benefits, communicate about it early and clearly.*



## Overall recommendation for working with rising sophomores and juniors:

Align your website and naviance profile while focusing on engagement, communicate about paying for college, and build a comprehensive visit experience.



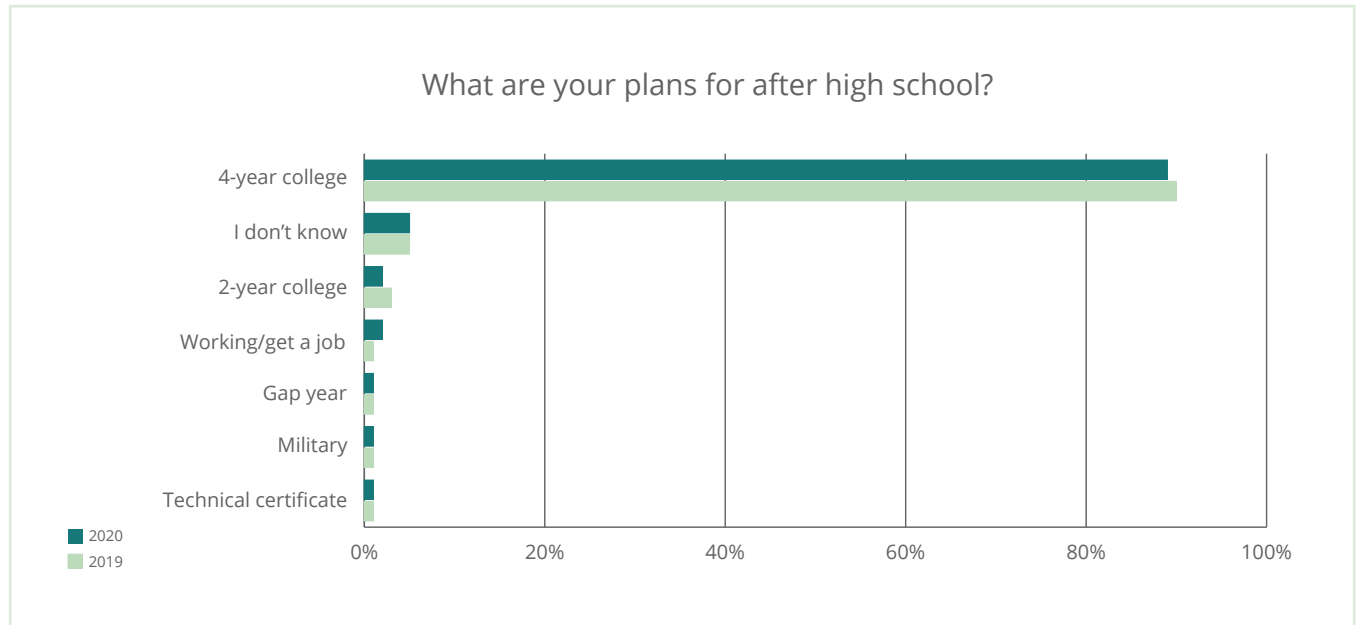
## 11th Grade Students



# 11th Grade Students

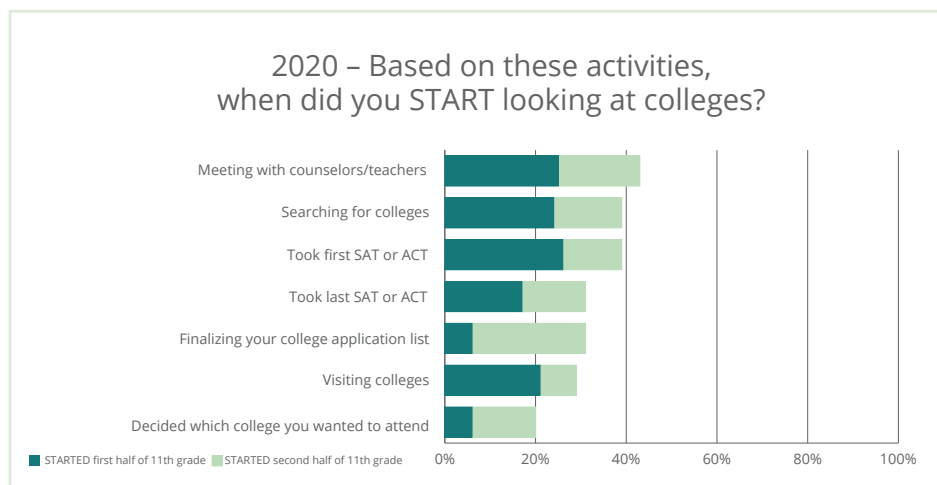
## Continuity in Plans After High School

When asked, 89% of 11th grade students indicated they were planning on attending a 4-year college. This trends very similarly to last year indicating insignificant change for 11th grade students from 2019 to 2020 with about 1-percent or less change in each category.



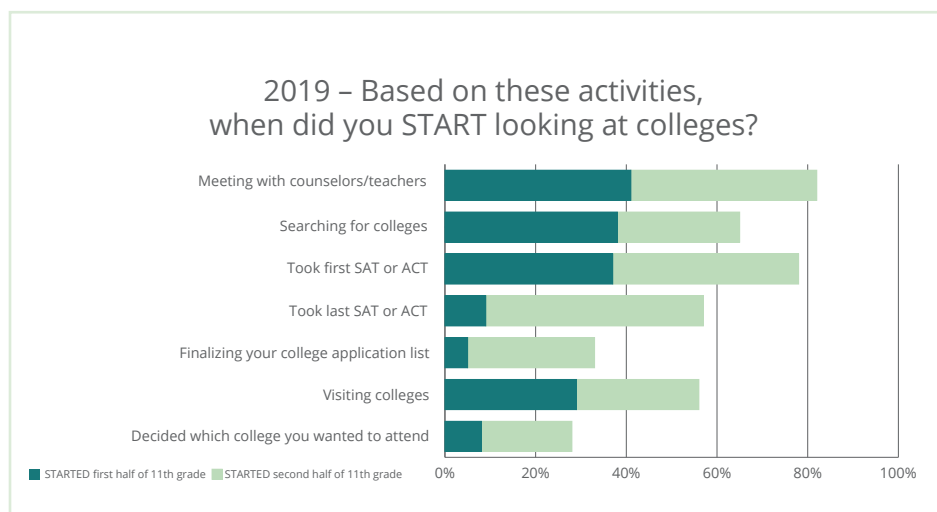
## Increased Need for Support

Students were asked when they started looking at colleges based on a list of activities. Many 11th grade students, had not started the key steps in college and career planning, such as visiting colleges, taking college entrance exams, or having discussions with high school counselors.



*Visiting colleges decreased by 18-percentage points in the Spring*

*Meeting with counselors / teachers decreased by 23-percentage points in the Spring*



*Took first SAT/ ACT decreased by 28-percentage points in the Spring*

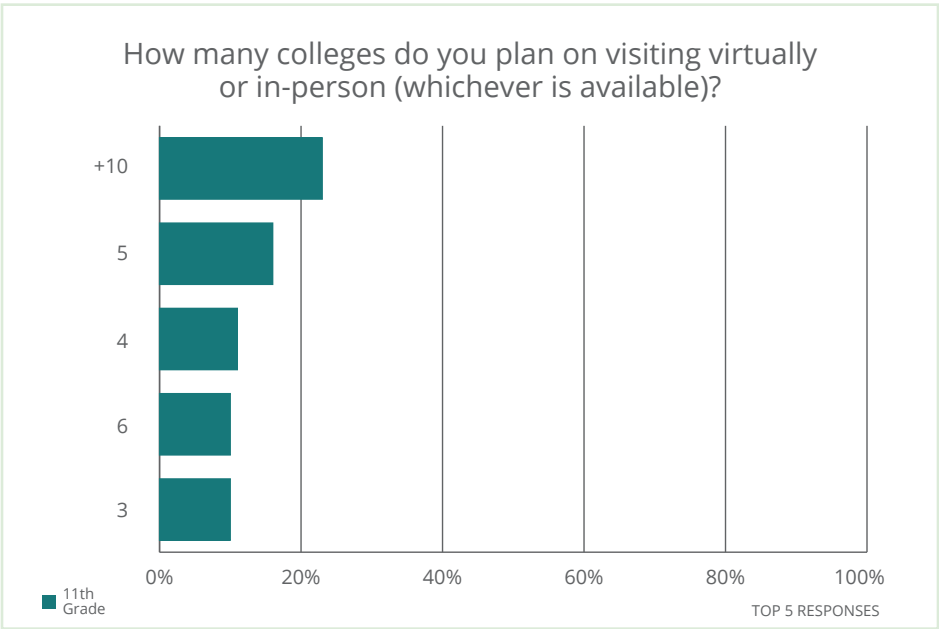
*Took last SAT/ ACT decreased by 34-percentage points in the Spring*

*It is in the best interest of students for institutions to be test optional with such a decrease in test taking this spring. 11th grade students are not having a normal experience and it will be important for colleges to provide additional support and personalization for these students.*



# Discovering College Opportunities

New this year, we asked students, “How many colleges do you plan on visiting virtually or in person (whichever is available)?” Almost a quarter of 11th grade students indicated that they were planning on 10 or more visits. The second most popular answer, among 16% of these students, was five visits.



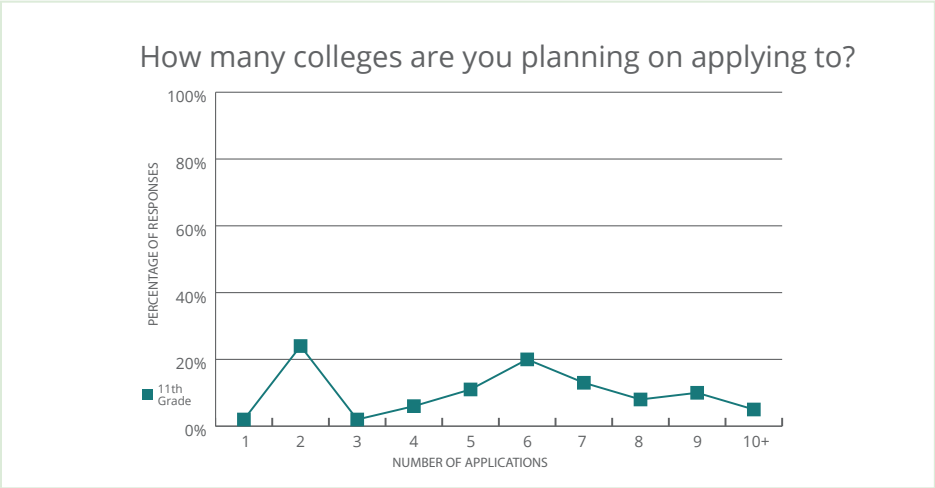
23% of 11th grade students plan on 10+ college visits

*The opportunities for rising seniors to participate in visit activities will increase. Ensure your institution is finding ways to differentiate from other visits students will attend. This is even more important if you rely solely on virtual visits.*



# Getting on 11th Grade Students' Short List of Application Schools

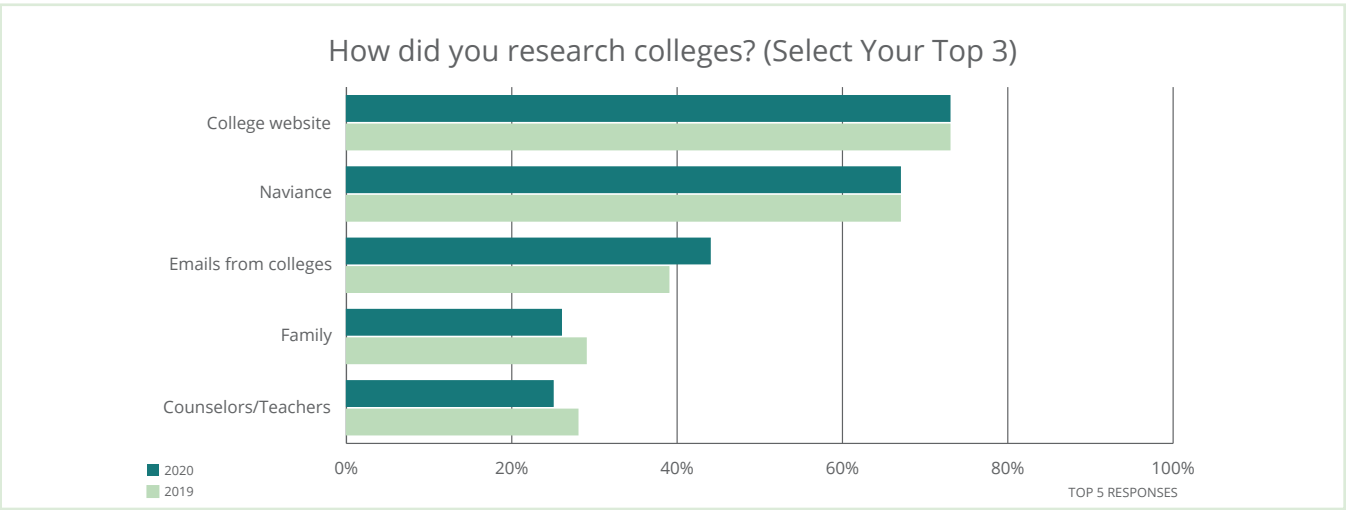
Students were asked how many college applications they planned to submit. Out of these same 11th grade students who plan to visit 10 or more schools, almost 25% will apply to only two. With visits more accessible than ever, students can use multiple formats to determine which schools they will apply to during the next phase of the cycle.



24% of  
11th graders plan on  
2 applications

## Research Sources are Shifting

In comparison to 2019, 11th grade students in 2020 reported greater reliance on sources coming directly from colleges. The perceived value of emails from colleges increased by 5-percentage points this year, while the number of students seeking information from counselors or teachers decreased by 3-percentage points.



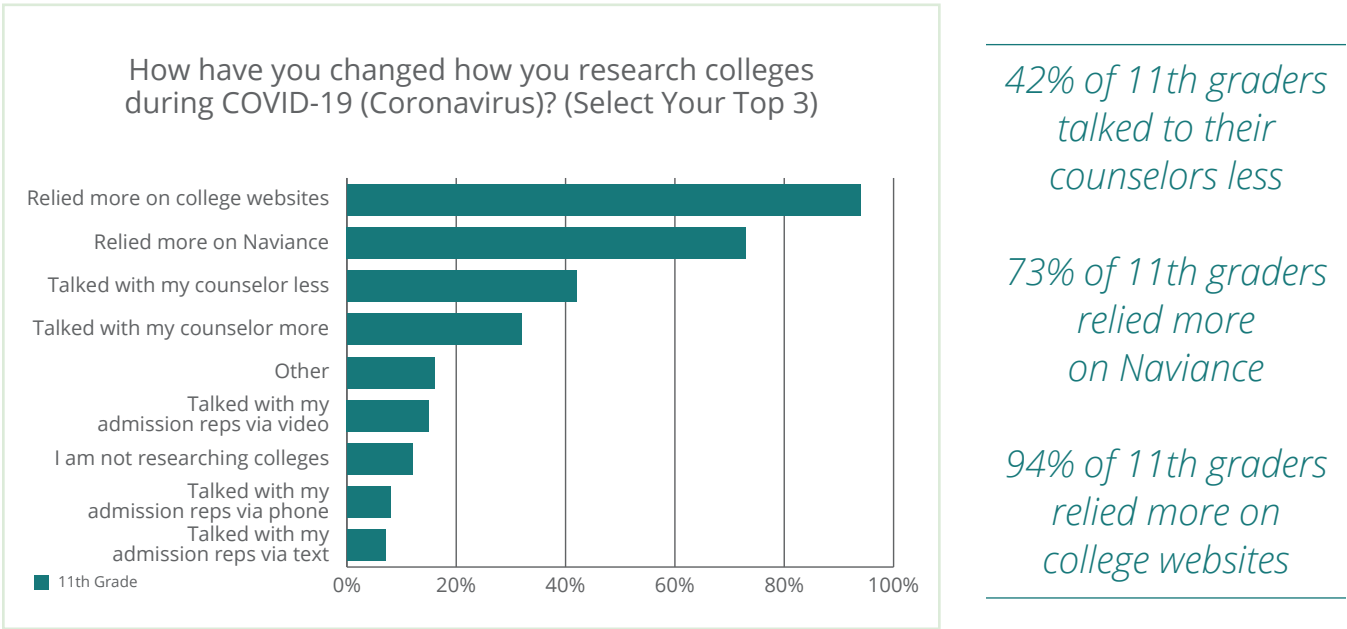
Students in 11th grade will need to connect with counselors in the fall, or it will be very difficult to whittle down their application list. Professional input on this activity is imperative. Make sure you are partnering with high school counselors as well as students and their families.



# COVID-19 Created Unique Trends in College Research

Students were asked how COVID-19 changed their college research methods. About one-half of 11th grade students responded that they talked to their counselor less, about three-quarters relied more on Naviance, and almost all stated that they relied more on college websites.

As these 11th grade students move into their senior year, they will continue searching for colleges and will be eager to connect with their school counselors during this process.



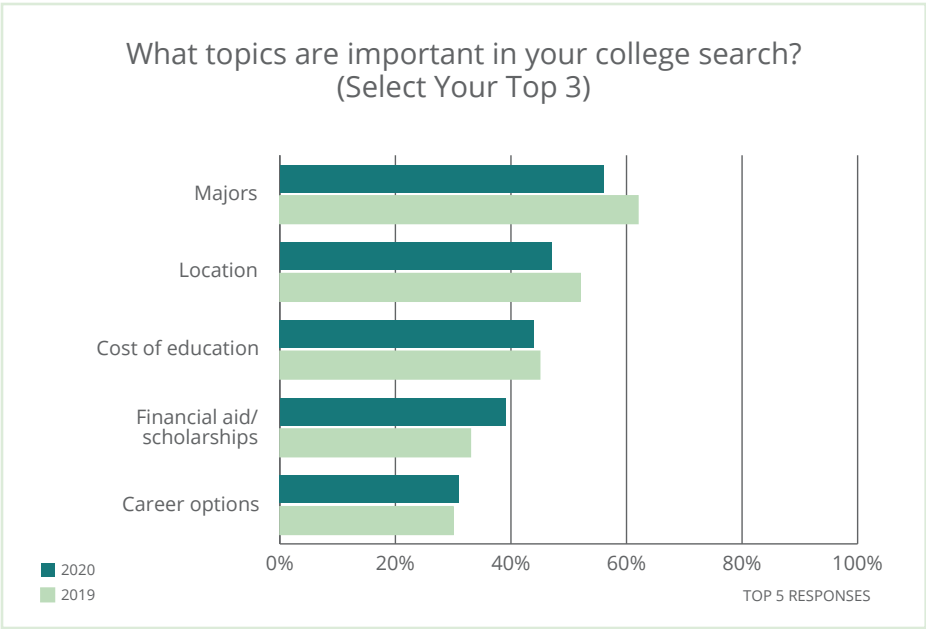
*With limited means to research colleges, students relied on emails from colleges, an oversaturated method of communication.*

*Craft intentional, personalized, and powerful messages for students over multiple channels.*



# Students are Paying More Attention to Financial Considerations

Among topics considered most important for 11th grade students' college search, academic major decreased by 6-percentage points, while financial aid/scholarships rose by 6-percentage points from last year.



*Majors decreased by 6-percentage points*

*Financial aid / scholarships increased by 6-percentage points*

*Students in 11th grade are going to continue searching for colleges and will scramble to catch up with their counselors during the process.*

*Keep your content, including your institution's Naviance profile, up to date.*

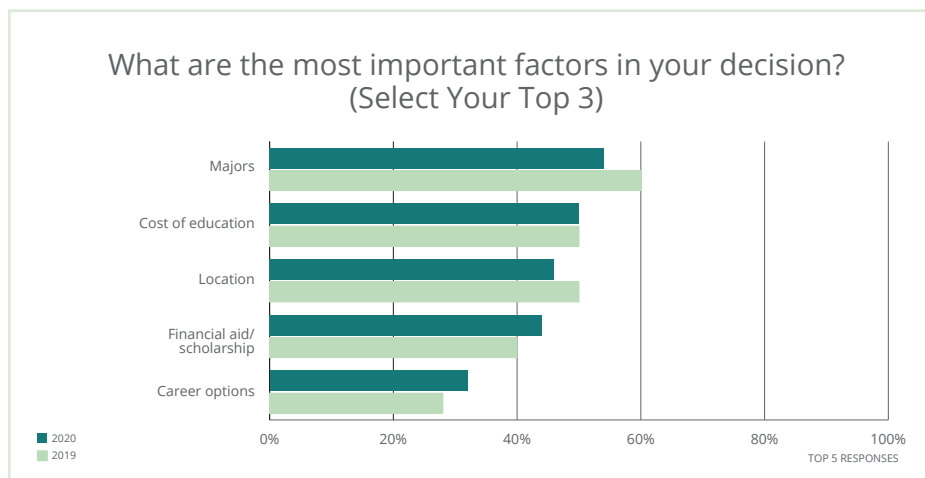
*As 11th grade students return to school in the fall for their senior year (virtually or in-person), both sides of the desk must be prepared to answer more questions about financial aid and scholarships than in the past , especially since students got a late start on the search process.*





## Rising Importance of Costs and Outcomes

We're seeing consistency from the search process to the decision stage. Students focus more on costs and outcomes as they shift from researching colleges to deciding on which one they will attend. Academic majors decreased in importance by 6-percentage points from 2019 to 2020, while financial aid/scholarships and career options increased by 4-percentage points each.



*Majors decrease by 6-percentage points*

*Financial aid/  
scholarships and  
career options  
increase by  
4-percentage  
points each*



### **Overall recommendation for working with rising seniors:**

personalize your communication and visit experience, emphasize differentiation more than you have in the past, and over communicate about costs and financial aid.







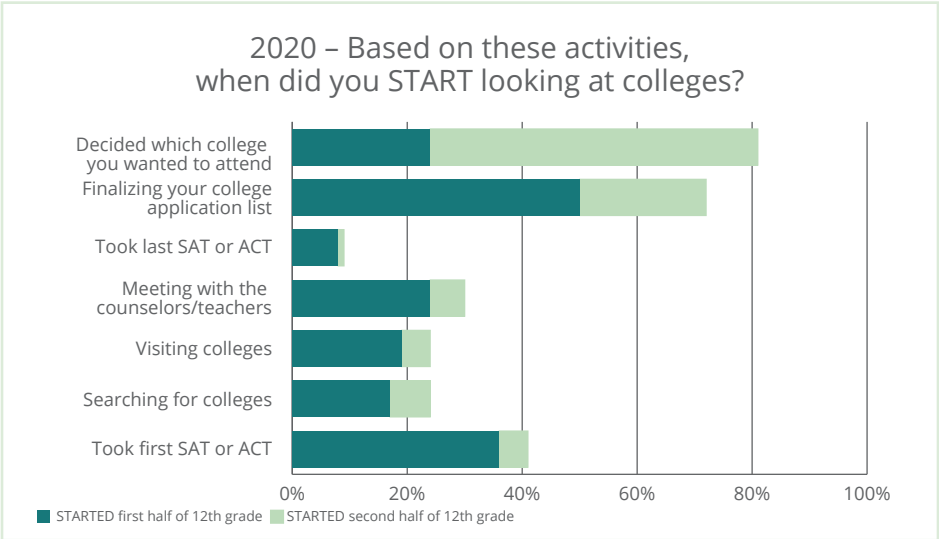
**12th Grade Students**



# 12th Grade Students

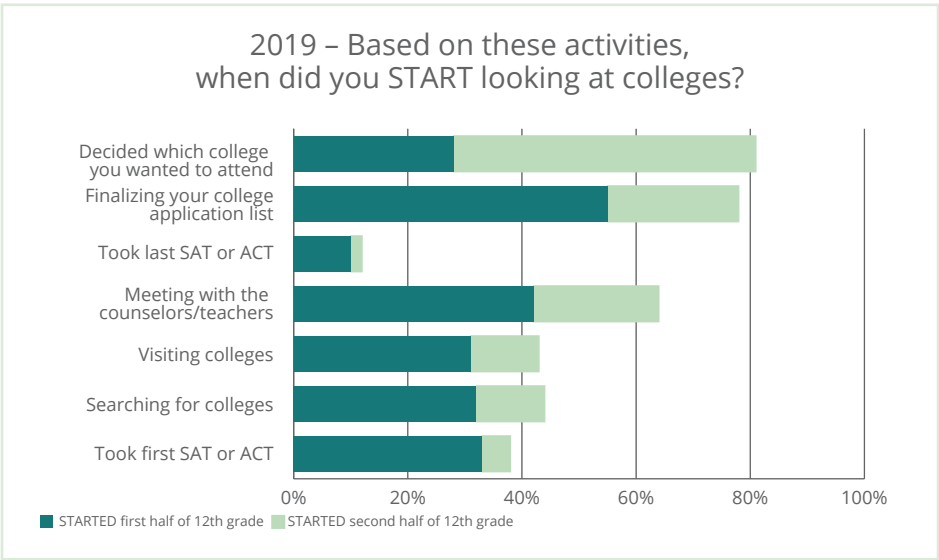
## Decrease in Transition Activities & Support

For 12th grade students, the survey revealed a decrease in transition activities. In the spring, visiting colleges decreased by 7-percentage points, and meeting with counselors or teachers was down by 16-percentage points. These results are more closely aligned with the distribution of most Early Action and Regular Decision packets. In 2019, however, the majority of students had made a decision before these materials were even sent out.



*Visiting colleges decreased by 7-percentage points in the Spring*

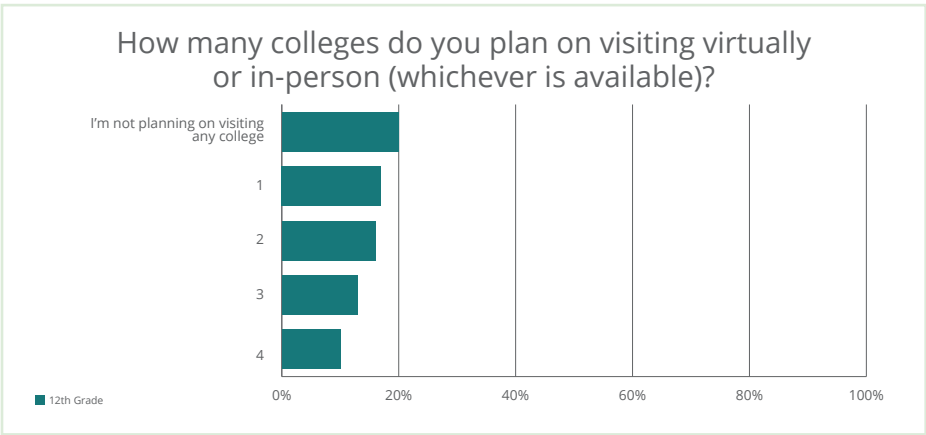
*Meeting with counselors / teachers decreased by 16-percentage points in the Spring*



*Many students will enter college this fall without some of the transition activities and support to help them prepare for a new academic environment. Colleges need to consider how to best serve those students upon arrival to help get them on the path to success.*

# Lack of Visits (In-Person or Virtual)

In this year’s survey, we asked students how many colleges they planned to visit (virtually or in-person). The majority of 12th grade students indicated that they were not planning on visiting any colleges. The second and third top answers were one visit and two visits, respectively. These students entering college had significantly fewer visits than the industry typically sees.



17% of seniors are visiting 1 college

20% of seniors aren't visiting colleges at all

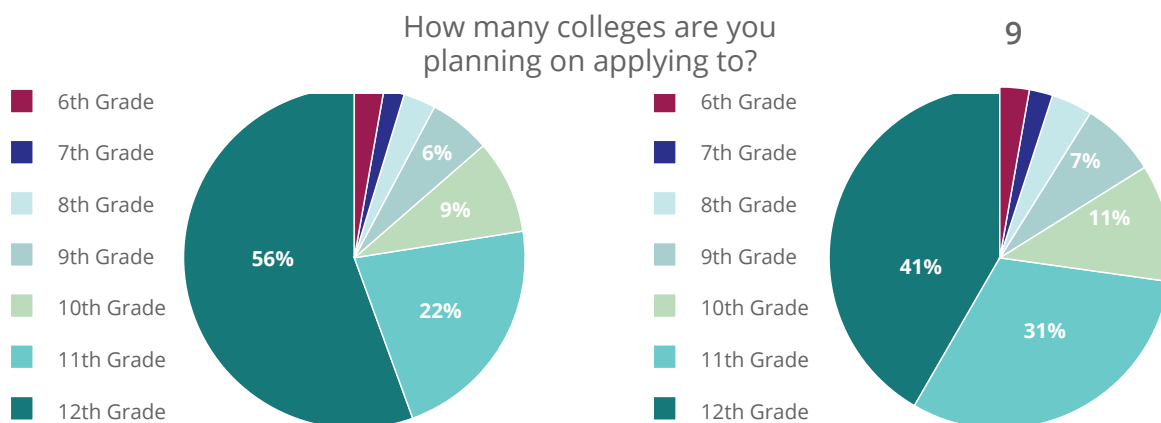
*When these 12th grade students enroll in college this fall, their experiences will be drastically different than their older counterparts. They will need substantial and innovative support to manage the transition.*

*Admission offices should think creatively about virtual ways of connecting to and engaging with prospective students. This will put them on track to meet best practices for the future.*



## Getting to the 12th Grade Students' Short List of Application Schools

18% of them planned to send out only one application, and 14% planned to submit over 10. In comparison, almost a quarter of 11th grade students indicated they planned to apply to two colleges.



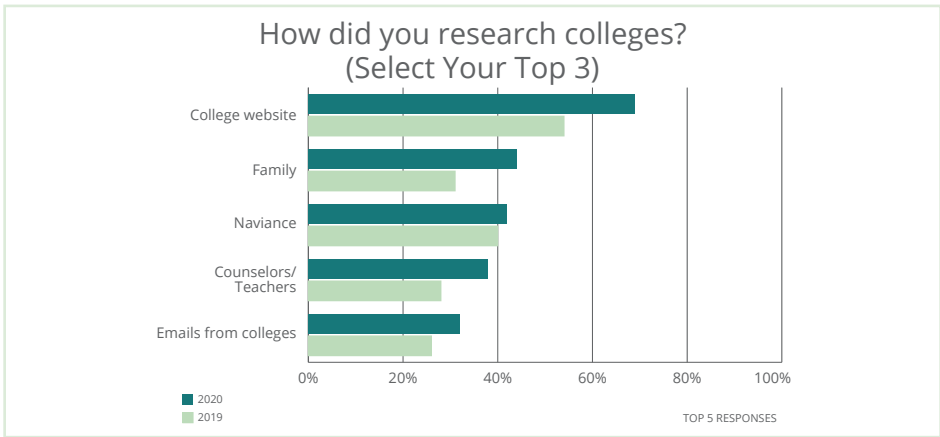
*A large group of 12th grade students is finding fit before ever applying to college, and a secondary group is clearly determining fit during the yield phase.*





# Family Support in the College Search

When asked how they looked for potential colleges, students reported a significant increase in reliance on family, counselors or teachers, and college websites during the research phase. Each of these categories saw around a 10-percentage point increase year-over-year.



Counselors / Teachers increased by 10-percentage points

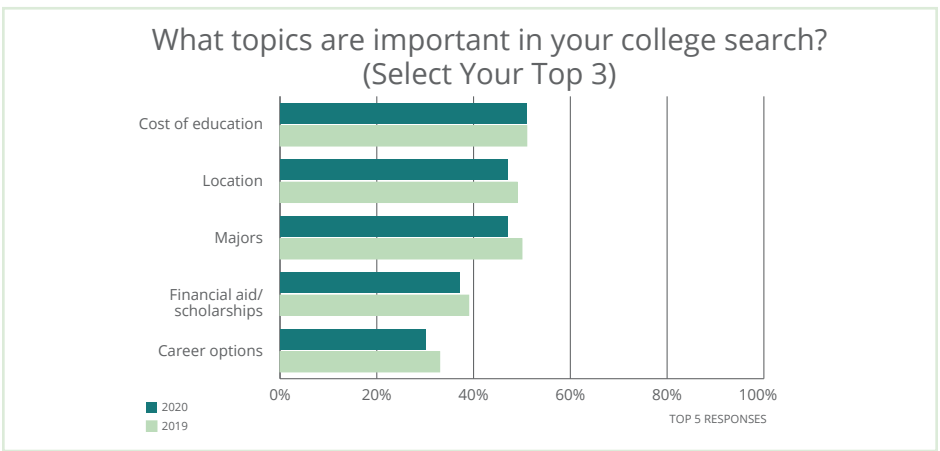
Family increased by 13-percentage points

12th grade increased in each of the top five methods of researching colleges. The group had the most balance of sources used for researching colleges: colleges, counselors/teachers, and family.

# Consistency in Search Topics

The survey revealed consistency among 11th and 12th grade students about factors that are important to them during the college search. Academic majors and career options are down slightly, but all other topics remained steady with this population in 2020, as well as year-over-year.

When comparing responses on this question from the class of 2021 last spring to answers on the most recent survey, there is a 6-percentage point increase in cost of education as a factor in the college search.

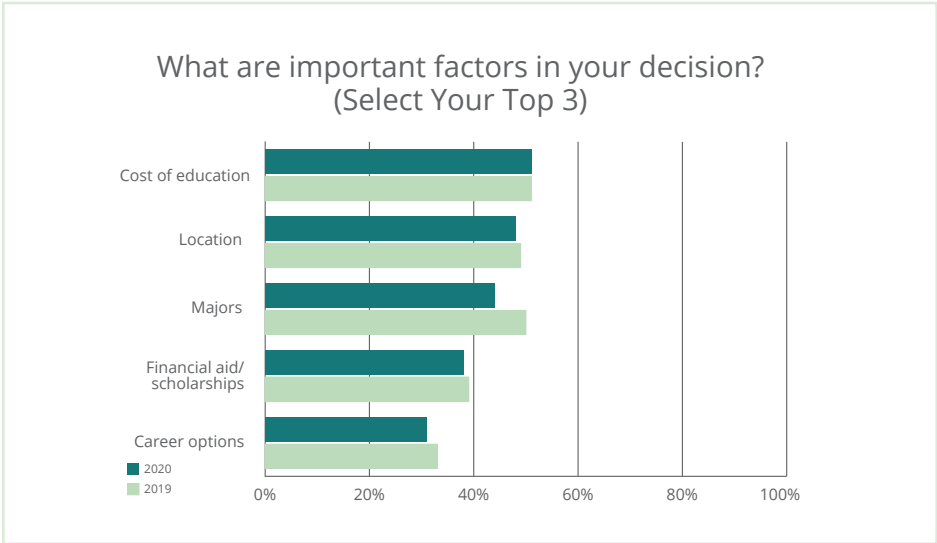


Majors and career options each decreased by 3-percentage points

The data from 12th grade students reinforces how much support students will need regarding money and financial education.

# Rise of Cost Concerns and Landing a Job

These 12th grade students are concerned about the cost of their college education and their ability to obtain employment after graduation. We see similarity in each of the top five responses.

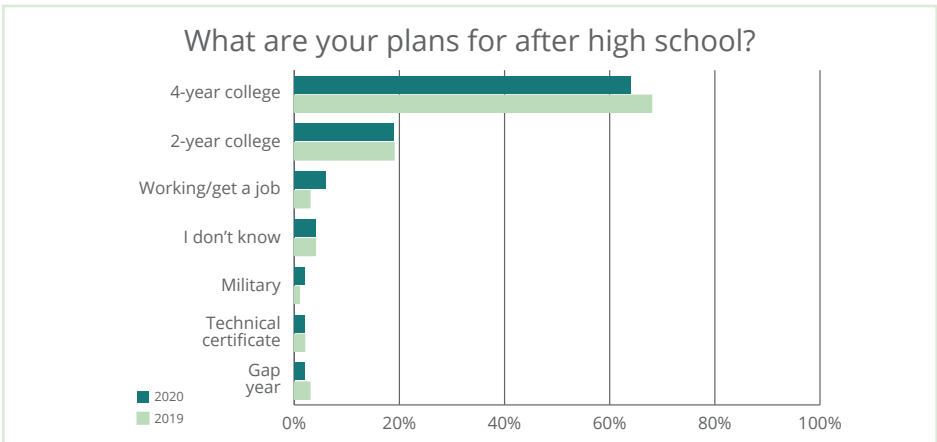


*Majors decreased by 6-percentage points*

*Support students by addressing the cost of higher education and financial aid. Coach them on how to gather information about costs, evaluate their options, and make decisions that will benefit them in the long-term. Take the whole person into consideration to ensure a successful student journey.*

## Exploring Options

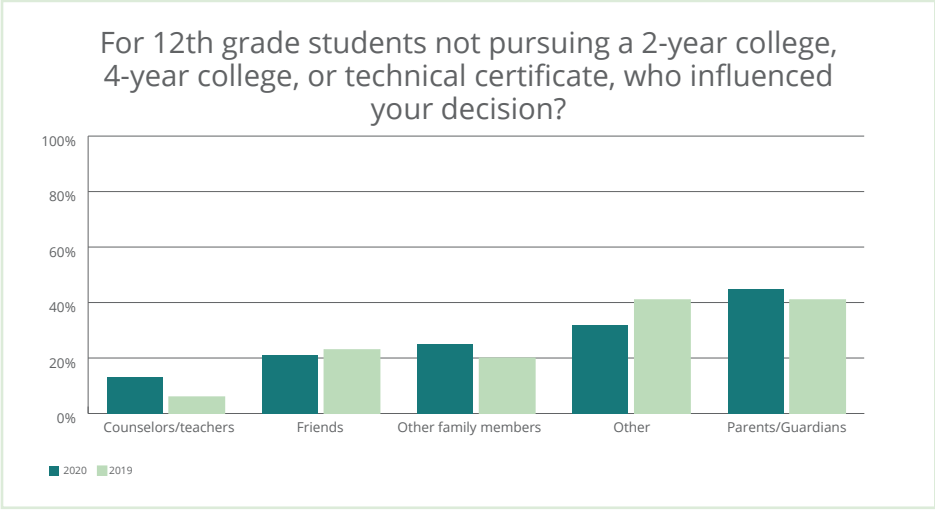
This spring, 83% of 12th grade students were planning to attend 2-year and 4-year colleges, down from almost 88% of seniors in 2019. In turn, our survey revealed a combined 5-percentage point increase in seniors choosing to pursue a technical certificate, get a job, or enter the military. The number of students planning to attend a 4-year college decreased by 4-percentage points.



*4.5-percentage point increase in military and working equals point loss in 2-year and 4-year college*

# Rise in Recommending Gap, Military, and Work

We asked 12th grade students who did not plan to pursue a 2-year or 4-year degree or technical certificate who influenced their decision. For this year, the percentage of counselors and/or teachers who encouraged students to choose a gap year, military, or the workforce over college and certification more than doubled over our findings in 2019.



*More than double the percentage of counselors/teachers*

*Data suggests that if students are on the fence this year for higher education, counselors are encouraging them to make other choices. Ensure counselors are well educated about your institution so they can make the best recommendations for their students.*



## Overall recommendations for working with incoming freshmen:

Build plans to support those who didn't participate in transition activities in the spring and summer by coaching them through key college preparation components.

Institutions need to keep a close eye on how effective these efforts were by watching what happens with a significantly less predictable than usual summer melt.



## Overall Recommendations



**Engage students** with messages aligned to their selection criteria during the upcoming recruiting process as it will be more important than ever.



**Communicate transparently** about financial aid, scholarship, and cost of education information and share that information early in the process.



Recruit future classes with additional **flexibility, support, and personalization**.



**Focus on differentiating** your visit experience among a sea of virtual options because students will be participating in these opportunities more than ever.



Continue to **develop tailored and innovative experiences** to connect and engage with students including completely virtual and hybrid options.





## ABOUT HOBSONS

Hobsons helps students identify their strengths, explore careers, create academic plans, match to best-fit educational opportunities, and reach their education and life goals. Through our solutions, we enable thousands of educational institutions to improve college and career planning, admissions and enrollment management, and student success and advising for millions of students around the globe.

## ABOUT INTERSECT

Intersect by Hobsons is a best-fit recruitment platform offering a comprehensive set of solutions for colleges and universities to strategically reach best-fit students, those most likely to both apply and succeed at your institution.

Intersect connects with Naviance, the nation's most widely-adopted college, career and life readiness platform, used by over 10 million students nationwide. It enables colleges and universities to better connect with high school students actively engaged in the college prep process. Intersect also makes it easier to collaborate and create connections with high school counselors to support a successful student journey.

